

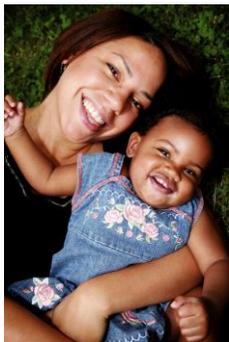


**NBCDI**  
National Black Child  
Development Institute



# Faith-Based and Community Leaders Early Learning Toolkit

A Comprehensive Guide for Faith-based and  
Community Leaders Committed to the Lifelong  
Success of Children and Families



# Faith-Based and Community Leaders Early Learning Toolkit

## Table of Contents

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Letter to Faith-based and Community Leaders	3
Introduction	4
<b>Section 1: Learning Begins at Home—Partner with Families to Build Lifelong Learners</b>	5
Section 1a: Brain Development	5
Section 1b: Resources on Brain Development	6
Section 1c: Supporting Brain Development	6
Section 1d: Educate Parents and Caregivers on High-Quality Early Learning	7
<b>Section 2: Empower Families to Advocate for Children’s Education</b>	9
Section 2a: Family Engagement Resources	9
Section 2b: Family Engagement Activities	10
Section 2c: Resources for Parents of Children with Special Needs	11
<b>Section 3: Best Practices for Uplifting the Community through Academic Enrichment, Health and Wellness, and School Partnership</b>	13
Section 3a: Getting Started: Early Learning Community Needs Assessments	14
Section 3b: Health and Safety Resources	15
Section 3c: Tools to Assess Early Learning Environments	16
Section 3d: High-Quality Workforce	18
Section 3e: Frequently Asked Questions: Early Care and Education Funding	19
<b>Section 4: Call to Action: Purging the Preschool to Prison Pipeline</b>	22
Section 4a: Data and Research	22
Section 4b: Tools to Make A Difference	23
About Early Learning at the U.S. Department of Education	25
About the White House Initiative on Educational Excellence for African Americans	26
About the Center for Faith-Based and Neighborhood Partnerships	27
About National Black Child Development Institute (NBCDI)	28
Appendices:	
A: Early Learning Community Needs Assessment Guide	29
B: Early Learning Activities	34
C: Parent Checklist	36
D: Working with Parents to Understand Parenting Styles	37
E: Parent Involvement Continuum	39
F: 50 Ways to Get Families Engaged	40
G: Disability Terminology Chart	42
H: Other Early Learning Efforts	44
References	45



**NBCDI**  
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Dear Faith-Based and Community Leaders,

We are inspired by you and your unrelenting commitment to strengthening our communities. We understand the importance of the services you provide, and we are pleased to provide a toolkit to help support you and your organization's commitment to ensuring that young children can thrive academically, emotionally, socially, and physically.

The White House Initiative on Educational Excellence for African Americans (Initiative) has partnered with the U.S. Department of Education's Center for Faith-Based and Neighborhood Partnerships and National Black Child Development Institute (NBCDI) to develop this toolkit for faith-based and community leaders. This toolkit will assist you and your community in developing, implementing, and sharing high-quality early learning and educational opportunities for children and families. Early learning opportunities begin long before Kindergarten. In fact, children whose educational needs are poorly met in the first five years of life fall behind in school readiness and face many challenges in school. We believe that by enhancing investments in high-quality early care and educational programs for infants, toddlers, and preschoolers in your community, our children are better prepared for academic success and are provided with strong foundations upon which they can thrive emotionally and spiritually.

This toolkit is designed to support you in expanding or initiating early learning programming for young children and their families. We developed this toolkit using research-based evidence that stresses the significance of high-quality early learning. We identify practices from faith-based and community organizations across the Nation and include tips, best practices, and useful links. We grounded such practices in holistic approaches that are designed to uplift children, families, and your community.

Consistent with the Executive Order, signed by President Obama on June 26, 2012, that established the White House Initiative on Educational Excellence for African Americans, this toolkit focuses on information to help young African American children, but we believe that the information will be very useful in helping all young children.

Please be sure to share pictures, video, and recommendations from your early learning programs. We are eager to hear about your work. Thank you in advance for responding to President Obama's call to improve educational outcomes for young African American children.

Sincerely,

*David Johns*

David Johns, Executive Director  
White House Initiative on Educational Excellence for African Americans

*Tobeka Green*

Tobeka Green, President and CEO  
National Black Child Development Institute (NBCDI)

*Brenda Girton-Mitchell*

Reverend Brenda Girton-Mitchell, Director  
Center for Faith-Based & Neighborhood Partnerships  
US Department of Education

## Section 1: Introduction

Faith-based and other community organizations are an important force in uplifting communities and keeping families strong. These organizations are uniquely suited to bring together residents and local leaders to address pressing challenges and provide information to individuals that can be used to improve and strengthen communities.<sup>i</sup> Faith-based and community leaders have provided education and refuge. For example, Atlanta's Big Bethel A.M.E. Church founded one of the first historically Black colleges in the United States, Morris Brown College, which is still organized for and by African Americans today.<sup>ii</sup>

Faith-based and neighborhood leaders continue to hold a prominent place in communities, including African American communities, because they support the interests of their communities and families. For example, from slavery to Civil Rights, Black faith-based and community leaders have played an important part in advocating for social movements and community empowerment.<sup>iii</sup>

This toolkit is designed to support faith-based and community leaders and communities in fostering the learning and development of African American children and families, from the start. High-quality early learning programs provide infants, toddlers, and preschoolers with stimulating and responsive environments that enhance their cognitive, language, physical, and social-emotional development.

Specifically, this toolkit is designed to:

- Highlight the important role of faith-based and community leaders and their organizations in educating African American children and families;
- Identify innovative approaches that faith-based and community organizations are taking to support education and learning outcomes for young African American children from underserved neighborhoods;
- Connect faith-based and community leaders with evidence-based practices, resources, action steps, and ideas to launch and enhance initiatives that support educational opportunities for African American children, that foster their personal and academic success;
- Empower families to be advocates for their child's education and well-being;
- Emphasize the connection between educational success and overall health and wellness of children;
- Recognize that faith-based and community organizations are uniquely suited to take a holistic approach to uplifting children and families;
- Identify grants and state and federal funding resources available to faith-based and community organizations for academic enrichment programs; and
- Acknowledge early learning initiatives at the federal level and highlight opportunities for faith-based and community organizations to be a voice for African American children, as school systems are implementing changes.

## Section 1: Learning Begins at Home: Partnering with Families to Build Lifelong Learners

Faith-based and community organizations are a vital source of support for many families. Parents and caregivers often look to faith-based and community leaders and organizations to share moral values, traditions, and culture while supporting educational excellence. In this section of the toolkit, we highlight two key ways that faith-based and community organizations can support families in: 1) ensuring a solid foundation for children's learning and development and 2) empowering family members to be engaged in their child's academic success.

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**“Children develop in an environment of relationships that begin in the home and include extended family members, early care and education providers, and members of the community.”<sup>iv</sup>**

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### Section 1a: Brain Development

The first few years of life are when a child's brain develops most rapidly, making this period the most critical time for parents and caregivers to help shape their child's future success. Positive early interactions between the child and his/her parents or caregivers are the foundation for social-emotional and cognitive development. Children identify with, imitate, and begin to internalize values, expressions, and approaches to problem-solving from their caregivers. Caregiver-child interactions and environment shape brain growth and capacity.

A key to promoting early brain development with parents and caregivers is letting them know that they already possess many of the skills to develop their child's brain. A child's brain development is positively affected by early language, math, and science experiences, such as listening, talking, reading, singing, writing, counting, and exploring his/her world. These interactive activities work to help shape future learning. Parents and caregivers promote increased language development when they are intentional about the amount and quality of speech used with their child. Families can take advantage of opportunities for learning through everyday activities and routines, such as playtime, diapering, grocery shopping, and feeding time. Communication and language development are two-way processes: 1) the child has opportunities to practice and refine language skills, and 2) the parents and caregivers are able to monitor their child's language skills.<sup>v</sup>

Another important component to early brain development is ensuring that the social and emotional needs of children are met. Secure and safe attachments between children and their parents and caregivers provide a strong foundation for children to develop socially, emotionally, and academically within their environment.<sup>vi</sup> A secure attachment with a parent or caregiver builds trust and lets a child know he/she is safe to explore and learn more about the world around him/her, jumpstarting the development and learning process. Healthy early brain development has a lasting impact on a child's ability to learn.

## Section 1b: Resources on Early Brain Development

The following are examples where faith-based and community leaders and organizations can find additional support, information, and resources on brain development and the developmental needs of young children:

- [National Association for the Education of Young Children \(NAEYC\)](#) - A professional membership organization that works to promote high-quality early learning for all young children, birth through age eight, by connecting early childhood practice, policy, and research.
- [Vroom](#) - An interactive resource that provides creative tools and materials that inspire families to turn everyday experiences into brain building moments.
- [Too Small to Fail](#) - A leading public awareness and action campaign to promote the importance of early brain and language development by empowering parents with tools to talk, read, and sing with their young children from birth.
- [Healthy Children](#) by American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP) - An organization of 64,000 pediatricians committed to the optimal physical, mental, and social health and well-being of all infants, toddlers, children, adolescents, and young adults.
- [Harvard University's Center on the Developing Child](#) – A center dedicated to driving science-based innovation that achieves breakthrough outcomes for children facing adversity.
- [La Leche League \(LLL\)](#) - An international non-profit organization devoted to helping mothers breastfeed through mother-to-mother support, encouragement, information, and education, and to promote a better understanding of breastfeeding as an important element in the healthy development of the baby and mother.

## Section 1c: Supporting Brain Development

### Pre-Natal Success

The foundation for successful learning outcomes starts in the womb and early infancy. Faith-based and community organizations can support new and soon-to-be parents by providing opportunities to learn about child development, parenting success, and new parent wellness. Pregnancy and childbirth have a tremendous effect on the health of mothers and their families. Unfortunately, Black women have the highest risk of dying from pregnancy related complications<sup>vii</sup> in the United States. Additionally, Black infants die at more than twice the rate of non-Hispanic white infants.<sup>viii</sup> To support the healthy start of mothers and their children, faith-based and community organizations can support pregnant women and expecting fathers in various ways. The following list offers ways that faith-based and community organizations can ensure that women and newborns thrive from the start:

- Open up faith-based and community centers to host monthly new parent meet-up groups through La Leche League (LLL) or other organizations.
- Partner with local mid-wives or birth consultants/doulas to provide birthing classes for expectant parents.
- Create a faith-based and neighborhood support group for new mothers and fathers by encouraging experienced parents and grandparents to offer advice and support.
- Promote maternal-child health and wellness visits by hosting health fairs for new mothers and babies.
- Plan sessions for siblings under five years old to learn about strategies to support their parents and new sibling.
- Bring local organizations to faith-based and neighborhood centers to share resources about infant care and development. Possible topics include health and nutrition, child behavior and safety, and early brain development.
- Host a baby shower for new and soon-to-be parents to offer additional resources and items, such as baby clothes, diapers, blankets, baby food, and age-appropriate books.

## Early Childhood and Beyond

“Early childhood is a time of great promise and rapid change, when the architecture of the developing brain is most open to the influence of relationships and experiences.”<sup>ix</sup> To support healthy brain development, faith-based and community leaders can encourage families and caregivers to engage in a range of activities. *Appendix B<sup>x</sup>* provides examples of activities that can support healthy brain development in infants and can be implemented by families with young children and caregivers in new or existing early learning programs. Faith-based and community leaders may wish to distribute a copy of the activities to parents and caregivers and encourage parents and caregivers to be creative and intentional about engaging the whole family in the child’s learning by implementing activities that provide a strong, healthy foundation for young children and their families in their community.

Leaders can foster opportunities that allow communities, organizations and/or families to:

- Share traditions with children and youth through literature and the arts. Examples include:
  - Forming toddler, children, or youth choirs, dance groups, or bands to promote learning and development through the performing arts.
  - Highlighting children in religious and other texts that made positive impacts in their community.
  - Selecting youth to read, recite, or dramatize meaningful texts.
- Develop a youth mentoring program at faith-based and neighborhood centers.
- Create an afterschool and/or summer program that offers services, such as tutoring, interest clubs, sports teams, and other positive recreational activities.
- Offer alternative spring and summer break program options for children and youth interested in community service.
- Enlist children and youth to support regular service projects throughout the year. Examples include canned food and clothing donation drives, and letter-writing campaigns for those in need.
- Host regular family field days that promote health and wellness while fostering the physical and social-emotional development of children and families. Possible activities include friendly sporting events, aerobic exercise classes, and healthy cooking demonstrations.
- Hold holiday celebration performances that showcase children’s talents to the entire community.

## **Section 1d: Educate Parents and Caregivers on the Key Components of High-Quality Early Learning**

Access to high-quality early learning opportunities beginning at birth ensures that young children are prepared for success in school, postsecondary education, and the workforce. The following list offers examples of key components of high-quality early learning experiences needed to help ensure that faith-based and community leaders and organizations provide optimal opportunities for early learning:<sup>xi</sup>

- **Health and Safety Practices:** Provide an early learning environment that is healthy and safe. It is important to establish healthy practices throughout the day in the learning environment. Some of these practices include diapering and toileting, handwashing, serving meals, as well as cleaning, sanitizing, and disinfecting items and spaces. It is also important to ensure that all environments are free of potential safety hazards and have adequate supervision to prevent potential health and safety risks.
- **Evidence-Based and Culturally Responsive Curriculum:** Use curriculum supported by current research and best practices and that meets the cultural and developmental needs of all children and families.
- **Age-Appropriate Learning Standards:** Set goals for cognitive, social-emotional, language and physical development that align with school readiness skills. Communities are encouraged to research the early learning and development standards for their state to ensure that their selected curriculum meets these standards.

- **Family Engagement:** Develop and implement systems and practices that intentionally engage parents and caregivers to stay involved in their child’s learning.
- **Learning Time and Environment:** High-quality early learning programs ensure that young children have vibrant, interactive learning environments that encourage their natural curiosity. These settings should include a wide range of safe, developmentally appropriate indoor and outdoor materials that promote play, exploration, and discovery. Materials should also be rotated regularly to refresh the learning environment.
- **Education and Compensation:** Early childhood educators should meet their state’s education and training requirements, have access to continuous high-quality professional development, and earn adequate compensation to ensure they are adequately prepared to provide high-quality early care and education environment to all children.
- **Professional Development:** Professional development opportunities include ongoing observation and feedback, coaching, training, and education, including opportunities for early childhood educators and professionals to pursue advanced degrees. Early childhood educators should also engage in intentional and reflective teaching and learning practices.
- **Strong Leadership:** Faith-based and community leaders can serve as facilitators or appoint strong, qualified leaders to set high standards and expectations and integrate developmentally appropriate practices into their early learning programs.
- **Adult-Child Ratios:** Programs should adhere to standards for adult-child ratios to adequately meet children’s needs depending on their ages and stages of development. Faith-based and community organizations are encouraged to refer to their state licensing standards or early learning and development standards for appropriate adult-child ratios.
- **Support for Children with Special Needs or English Language Learners (ELLs):** Ensure policies and procedures are in place to refer children to necessary services if concerns regarding a child’s development are observed by their early care and education provider, parent, or caregiver. Research and implement best practices in instructional strategies to meet the needs of ELLs. Additional information and resources can be found in the joint policy statement on supporting the development of children who are dual language learners in early childhood programs by the U.S. Department of Education and U.S. Department of Health and Human Services.<sup>xii</sup>

Research<sup>xiii</sup> has shown short-term and long-term benefits of positive early learning experiences. For example, The Urban Child Institute suggests that early learning promotes increased vocabulary scores and improved attendance. Potential long-term benefits of early learning include increased high school graduation rates, an ease of transitions from childhood to adulthood, increased job earnings, and better health.<sup>xiv</sup>

## Section 2: Empower Families to Advocate for Children's Education

Historically, community organizations, including those in African American communities have played an important role in the education of children and families. Today, these communities honor this legacy by continuing to strengthen and empower families to advocate for their child's education. As with all families, African American families help their children positively develop when healthy adults support them in becoming confident, well-educated, and contributing members of society. Faith-based and community leaders play a critical role in shaping positive family environments and building family networks. Faith-based and community organizations can be great spaces to promote early learning opportunities and family empowerment, including family support networks.

### What is Family and Community Engagement?

Family and Community Engagement is:

- An ongoing process that strengthens participation, communication, and collaboration between parents, families, caregivers, schools, and faith-based and community organizations with the goal of educating and meeting the needs of the whole child to ensure student achievement and success.
- An opportunity for families to engage with school personnel and faith-based and community leaders about the role of parents and caregivers in their child's education through home visiting, ongoing scheduled meetings, conferences, open houses, and other activities.

### Why is Family and Community Engagement Important?

There is overwhelming evidence that suggests that family and community engagement improves academic outcomes. Faith-based and community leaders can strengthen these outcomes by promoting learning activities within their communities to support connections between home, school, and community. The National Education Association (NEA) shared a report that concluded that students with involved parents are more likely to:<sup>xv</sup>

- Earn higher grades and test scores, and enroll in higher-level academic programs;
- Be promoted, pass their classes, and earn credits;
- Attend school regularly;
- Maintain positive peer relationships, language, self-help skills, meaningful youth and adult connection/ relationships, and strong peer and adult role models;
- Transition successfully from special education classes to general classes;
- Have better social skills, show improved behavior, and adapt well to school; and
- Graduate and advance to postsecondary education.

The following resources provide examples of how faith-based and community leaders can encourage and support parents and families to become active participants in their child's education from Kindergarten to 12<sup>th</sup> grade and beyond.

## Section 2a: Family Empowerment Resources

### "I Have a Question" Parent Checklist

All children are entitled to a high-quality education that begins with a firm foundation in the early years. Faith-based and other community organizations are encouraged to support parents and caregivers to ask questions about their child's learning and school environment. The "*I HAVE A QUESTION... What Parents and Caregivers Can Ask and Do to Help Children Thrive at School: A Parent Checklist*"<sup>xvi</sup> can

serve as a resource to help guide parents and caregivers. The checklist, developed by the U.S. Department of Education, outlines what families should be able to expect for their child's education. For example, one item from the checklist asks:

**Quality: Is my child getting a great education?**

- How will you keep me informed about how my child is doing on a regular basis? How can we work together if my child falls behind?
- Is my child on grade level, and on track to be ready for college and a career? How do I know?

The entire list can be found in *Appendix C*, including questions on testing, health/safety, teacher quality and equity.

**National Black Child Development Institute's Family Empowerment Program (FEP)**

Developed by the National Black Child Development Institute (NBCDI), the Family Empowerment Program (FEP) is a family engagement curriculum that builds the capacity of parents and caregivers as leaders of their families. Throughout this twelve-week program, families are equipped with the knowledge, tools, and skills needed to foster their child's learning and development while effectively advocating for them from birth through college. The program is designed to guide and coach parents and caregivers through a strengths-based lens that honors the rich cultural and linguistic values of families of color. NBCDI's Family Empowerment Program is:

- **Culturally Responsive:** Infuses the social-cultural context of families lived experiences.
- **Culturally Relevant:** Builds on families' identified needs.
- **Trauma Sensitive:** Takes a holistic approach to building the capacity of families by educating families on brain development, toxic stress, Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs), and the importance of building resiliency and developing protective factors in children and their families.
- **Evidence-Based:** Is aligned with current research and best practices.
- **Developmentally Appropriate:** Fosters children's learning and development while honoring their individual strengths, needs, and culture.
- **Enhanced:** Is designed based on feedback from families.
- **Action-Oriented:** Promotes active family engagement by connecting families with local resources that strengthen their capacity to succeed.

NBCDI's Family Empowerment Program consists of six topic areas that incorporate a range of interactive, engaging, and evidence-based activities.

- Topic 1: Reflections
- Topic 2: Health and Wellness
- Topic 3: Child Growth and Development
- Topic 4: Positive Guidance
- Topic 5: Literacy and Numeracy
- Topic 6: Transitions (Early Care and Education)

**Section 2b: Family Empowerment Activities**

It is important that faith-based and community leaders recognize every child as intellectually curious, affirm their identity, and reject stereotypes that may impact their learning and social-emotional development. Faith-based and community leaders can invite parents and families to regular meetings to equip them with the knowledge needed to use their voice to advocate for their children and engage in brave conversations about their school, home, and faith or community spaces. Faith-based and

community leaders should consider using the handout “50 Ways to Get Families Engaged” (Appendix F) to support these conversations.

Several of the activities in the handout include:

- Celebrating youth excellence by hosting an awards ceremony to acknowledge students’ achievement in academics, attendance, community service, and other areas.
- Attending or hosting workshops or seminars on supporting academic excellence throughout and beyond the school year.
- Establishing a family resource center at school and at a faith-based or community center.
- Creating a toy or book lending library at a faith-based or community center and encourage children and families to visit regularly.
- Developing and attending family support programs or groups at a faith-based or community center.
- Encouraging parents and caregivers to explore postsecondary opportunities for their children by connecting them with mentors or leading college tours.
- Conducting family workshops on problem solving, conflict resolution, and public speaking.
- Serving on school advisory councils or committees on curriculum, discipline, school-community outreach, and other relevant topics.
- Organizing family field trips to the library, zoo, museum, or park to promote fun learning experiences.
- Helping schools create a students’ rights and responsibilities guide for children and families.
- Hosting parenting classes on topics, such as child development and positive guidance and discipline.

## Section 2c: Resources for Parents of Children with Special Needs

In 2013-14, the number of children and youth ages 3-21 receiving special education services was 6.5 million, or about 13 percent of all public school students. Among all students with disabilities, 15 percent were Black/African American.<sup>xvii</sup> Faith-based and community groups can provide a strong source of support for parents and caregivers. It is not uncommon for parents of children with special needs to feel intimidated or disempowered within school settings. Children with special needs often require the most support and advocacy so they can succeed and overcome challenges. Faith-based and community leaders should make a special effort to engage and encourage families of children with developmental delays, disabilities, or behavioral challenges to feel welcomed, supported, and know that their children can succeed.

Here are a few examples of how faith-based and community organizations can support families with children with special needs:

- Host a youth night with teachers, disability rights advocates, doctors, speech and/or physical therapists, and parents and caregivers of children with special needs. This session can be a safe space where family members and interested community members may learn more information about disabilities, including the rights, resources, and services that children and families are entitled to.
- Provide parents and caregivers with information on how to access online resources. For example, the Center for Parent Information and Resources at <http://www.parentcenterhub.org/> has locations in each state and provides information about children with disabilities, early intervention, school services, and local policies and resources for families.
- Work with local educational agencies (LEAs), schools, and public and private early childhood programs to increase the inclusion of infants, toddlers, and preschool children with disabilities in high-quality early childhood programs. Additional information and resources can be found in the joint policy statement on the inclusion of children with disabilities in early childhood

programs by the US Department of Education and US Department of Health and Human Services.<sup>xviii</sup>

Finally, it is especially important for faith-based and community leaders, communities, and parents of children with special needs to know and use appropriate language when referring to children and people with disabilities sensitively and realistically. Faith-based and community leaders are encouraged to use the *Disability Terminology Chart (Appendix G)* to help their organization become knowledgeable about the ways to use descriptive words and language when talking to or about people with disabilities.

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**“The most important thing that families can do to support their children’s development is to be there. Kids need a supportive caregiver in their lives. If they’re scared, having trouble coping, they need to be able to turn to somebody. There’s so much evidence that having that stable, supportive caregiver in a child’s life builds resilience in children.”**

**Dr. Hanna-Attisha**

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### Section 3: Best Practices for Uplifting the Community through Academic Enrichment, Health, and Wellness

Overall, a number of minority groups such as African American children experience opportunity gaps and have less access to high-quality early learning programs. As central spaces in neighborhoods, faith-based and community organizations can offset some of these gaps by providing high-quality early learning programs in a safe, nurturing, and faith-centered environment. Faith-based and community leaders should advocate for these learning opportunities to strengthen families and communities. For faith-based and community leaders to do this work, they should develop well-planned, thoughtful, and engaging early learning plans. The following section provides additional resources and information to initiate or expand your early learning programs.

#### Communities Engaged in Early Learning

There are many examples of faith-based and community leaders and organizations doing important work to support early learning for children and youth. By acknowledging the assets in their communities, faith-based and community leaders can partner with existing faith-based or community-based organizations to learn and share best practices for early learning. Building these coalitions between faith-based and community organizations supports stronger schools, families, and communities. Here are a few examples of models that may be useful resources:

#### **TRINITY UNITED CHURCH OF CHRIST CHILD CARE CENTERS in Chicago, Illinois**

Trinity Child Care Program (Trinity) provides affordable and optimal opportunities for young children to succeed. The church offers comprehensive child care centers by developing services through their Prevention Initiative Program (birth to 3 years old) and Head Start programs (3 to 5 years old), expansion program (home-based learning services), and school-aged programs (5 to 20 years old). Trinity uses the Creative Curriculum, incorporating African-centered thought within its learning programs. Trinity United Church is a model for how a place of worship can provide holistic support to families while ensuring Black children have strong sense of identity and strong start to their education. For more information, faith communities are encouraged to visit [the Trinity Child Care Program website](#).

#### **ALEXANDRIA TUTORING CONSORTIUM in Alexandria, Virginia**

The Alexandria Tutoring Consortium (ATC) works in partnership with Alexandria's faith communities, elementary schools, and the City of Alexandria to recruit, train, and match volunteers from congregations, community groups, businesses, city agencies, and individuals who tutor kindergarteners and first graders to foster their early literacy and language development. Alexandria Tutoring Consortium is an example of how places of worship can partner with local organizations, government agencies, and other faith communities to offer academic services to young children in need. For more information, please visit [the Alexandria Tutoring Consortium website](#).

## URBAN YOUTH IMPACT in West Palm Beach, Florida

Urban Youth Impact provides comprehensive programs to 230 children and youth each week with an additional 270 children and youth being served through their local partnerships. Urban Youth Impact offers various enrichment activities, including tutoring, literacy-based learning, faith-based instruction, life skills and character building lessons, mentorships, STEM and performing arts instruction, field trips, and other recreational activities. In addition to providing programs for children, the Urban Youth Impact supports families by providing parenting classes and family nights; parent retreats and family picnics; Bible studies for women and men; and other family support, such as food, clothing, and housing assistance. Urban Youth Impact is an example of how faith communities and local agencies can partner to provide comprehensive programs and services to children, youth, and families in their community. For more information, please visit [the Urban Youth Impact website](#).

### Section 3a: Getting Started: Conducting an Early Learning Community Needs Assessment <sup>xix</sup>

In order to effectively serve the community, it is important to understand the community's needs for early learning programs. The findings from a community needs assessment will define the extent of the early learning needs that exist in your community and the depth of the assets available to address those needs and improve early learning opportunities. While there is no one "right" way to conduct a community needs assessment, this guide will help you strategically plan and deliver relevant, successful, and timely early learning services.

#### The Process

An early learning community needs assessment can be planned and conducted in a six-step process:

Step 1: Define the Scope

Step 2: Decide to Work Independently or Collaborate

Step 3: Collect Data

Step 4: Determine Key Findings

Step 5: Set Priorities and Develop an Action Plan

Step 6: Share Your Findings

The complete Early Learning Community Needs Assessment can be found in Appendix A of this toolkit.

Every early learning program requires important policies, procedures, and documentation to meet state regulations. Faith-based and community leaders are encouraged to contact their local or state licensing agency to find out more information about regulations in their state. To start an early learning program, faith-based and community leaders can view, edit, and create their own forms, letters, or guidelines using templates from resources like Texas's Family and Protective Services or Shared Resources Florida.

To view these resources, please visit the Texas Department of Family and Protective Services website at [http://www.dfps.state.tx.us/child\\_care/information\\_for\\_providers/cclforms.asp](http://www.dfps.state.tx.us/child_care/information_for_providers/cclforms.asp) or create a free log in on the Shared Resources Florida website at <http://www.sharedresourcesfl.org/>.

[Regional Child Care Coordinators](#) is also a resource for federal information regarding the startup process for child care centers throughout the United States and its territories.

### Section 3b: Health and Safety Resources

As central spaces in communities, faith-based and other community organizations respond to many community needs, including the need for high-quality early learning programs in a safe, nurturing, and faith-centered environment. Faith-based and community leaders should advocate for these early learning opportunities to help strengthen families and communities. For faith-based and community leaders to do this work effectively, they should develop well-planned, thoughtful, and engaging early learning plans. As faith-based and other community organizations open their doors to provide academic programs for infants, toddlers, and preschoolers, their environments should be safe, nurturing, and healthy spaces. While every state adheres to different guidelines, the following resources can help to ensure that their facilities are safe for children:

- **State and Territory Licensing Agencies and Regulations** - This document includes a table with direct website links to the child care licensing agencies and program regulations for all 50 States, the District of Columbia, and four U.S. Territories. This information is current as of June 2016 and is updated periodically. This resource can be found on the State and Territory Licensing Agencies and Regulations webpage of the Administration for Children & Families website at <https://childcareta.acf.hhs.gov/resource/state-and-territory-licensing-agencies-and-regulations>.
- **Health and Safety Checklist for Early Care and Education Programs** - This checklist provides a guide of 100+ items and steps that are needed to ensure safety for children. This resource can be found on the California Childcare Health Program through the University of California San Francisco website at [http://www.ucsfchildcarehealth.org/pdfs/Checklists/HS\\_Checklist.pdf](http://www.ucsfchildcarehealth.org/pdfs/Checklists/HS_Checklist.pdf).
- **Resources on Health and Safety in Early Child Care** - This list provides a detailed and categorized resource sheet for additional information, including books, organizations, and websites with more information on early child care safety. This resource can be found on the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) website at [https://www.naeyc.org/files/naeyc/Resources\\_Health\\_Safety\\_ECC.pdf](https://www.naeyc.org/files/naeyc/Resources_Health_Safety_ECC.pdf).
- **Caring for Our Children National Health and Safety Performance Standards: Guidelines for Early Care and Education Programs** - This resource contains a collection of 686 national standards that represent evidence, expertise, and experience from throughout the country on quality health and safety practices and policies that should be followed in today's early care and education settings. This resource can be found on the National Resource Center for Health and Safety in Child Care and Early Education website at <http://cfoc.nrckids.org/>.
- **Playground Safety Checklist** – This checklist offers information to ensure safe and healthy outdoor playtime experiences for young children. This resource can be found on the New Hampshire Department of Health and Human Services website at <http://www.dhhs.nh.gov/oos/cclu/documents/playgroundchecklist.pdf>.

## Resource: National Black Child Development Institute's *Good for Me!* Program

Developed by the National Black Child Development Institute (NBCDI), the *Good for Me!* Program is designed to engage children three to five years old in healthy eating and physical activity by introducing them to various fruits and vegetables, hands-on activities, and active play.<sup>xx</sup>

**The ultimate goal of the program is to improve young children's nutrition and health outcomes by:**

1. **Exposing them to a wide range of fruits and vegetables** to increase their:
  - Knowledge of food choice.
  - Comfort level eating fruits and vegetables daily.
2. **Moving daily to promote physical activity and play-based learning.**
3. **Reinforcing foundational skills** in the four areas of development.
  - Cognitive (Colors, numbers, and body parts)
  - Language (Alphabet knowledge, phonological awareness, oral development)
  - Physical (Balancing, catching, jumping)
  - Social-Emotional (Following directions, sharing, taking turns)<sup>xxi</sup>

The program also promotes family and community engagement in which families are actively encouraged to complete the "At Home Components" in the *Good for Me!* program to connect activities with actions parents can take with their children at home, such as making a recipe from the *Good for Me!* Cookbook together.<sup>xxii</sup>

In addition to the *Good for Me!* program and recipe book, NBCDI offers the Cultural Competence Improvement Tool. The Cultural Competence Improvement Tool helps educators review, compare, and assess key features of culturally responsive curricula in order to inform best practices in instruction with the students in their classrooms.

*Good for Me!* is designed specifically to honor and connect with African American children's families, cultures, and communities. Partners are also encouraged to host various family-wide events throughout the implementation of the program, including parent nights, health fairs, cooking demonstrations, one-on-one meetings with a nutritionist, physical activity field days, and dance classes.<sup>xxiii</sup>

To learn more about NBCDI's Health and Wellness programs and to download the Cultural Competence Improvement Tool, please visit the Health and Wellness section of the NBCDI website at <http://www.nbcdi.org/what-we-do/health-and-wellness>.

## Section 3c: Tools to Assess Early Learning Environments

The tools below are evidence-based resources used to determine the level of quality of different aspects of an early care and education program and can be used by faith-based and community leaders as benchmarks to quality. Faith-based and community leaders can also provide opportunities for their early childhood educators to attend professional development offered by the organizations below to help support continuous quality improvement in the early learning environment and classrooms.

### Quality Rating Improvement Systems

A Quality Rating Improvement System (QRIS) is designed to evaluate, enhance, and provide a standard level of quality for children in early and school-age care and education programs.<sup>xxiv</sup> The program providers that meet their state QRIS benchmarks are assigned quality ratings.<sup>xxv</sup> QRIS participants, such as faith-based communities, can improve the quality of their early or school-age care and education programs through continuous training, mentoring, technical support, and financial incentives.<sup>xxvi</sup>

To view these resources, faith-based and community leaders can visit resources such as [the QRIS National Learning Network](#),<sup>xxvii</sup> [the Administration for Children & Families' QRIS Resource Guide](#),<sup>xxviii</sup> [the National Association for the Education of Young Children's QRIS Resources](#),<sup>xxix</sup> and [Child Trends' "Early Childhood Highlights" Newsletter on the Quality Rating and Improvement Systems for Early Care and Education](#).<sup>xxx</sup>

### High-Quality Adult-Child Interactions

Research shows that high-quality adult-child interactions are the single most determining factor in a child's success later in life. While the environment, materials, and curriculum are important factors, high-quality interactions meet children's social-emotional needs and prepare them for academic success. , The [Classroom Assessment Scoring System \(CLASS\)](#) is one example of an observational tool that can be used to assess the quality of adult-child interactions. Adopted by the federal office of Head Start, CLASS is used to measure the quality of interactions and provide professional development for early childhood educators to improve and enhance the quality of their interactions with young children. The tool assesses interactions in the domains (categories) below by age group:

- **Infants**
  - Responsive Caregiving
- **Toddlers**
  - Emotional and Behavioral Support
  - Engaged Support for Learning
- **Preschool**
  - Emotional Support
  - Classroom Organization
  - Instructional Support

### Arranging the Early Learning Environment for Success

[The University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill](#)<sup>xxxi</sup> has designed rating scales to assess the quality of an early childhood or school-aged group. These scales can help educators understand what is necessary to implement high-quality early learning programs in their communities or strengthen existing programs. This process is designed to examine space and furnishings; personal care routines; language-reasoning; learning activities; staff-child and child-child interactions; program structure; and engagement with parents and staff. There are three different scales to help design and strengthen early learning environments:

- **(ITERS-R)** *The Infant/Toddler Environment Rating Scale-Revised* - A revision of the ITERS, designed to assess group programs for children from birth to 2 ½ years of age. The total scale consists of 39 items.
- **(ECERS-3<sup>xxxii</sup>)** *The Early Childhood Environment Rating Scale-3<sup>rd</sup> Edition* - A revision of the ECERS, designed to assess group programs for preschool through Kindergarten-aged children, from 2 to 5 years of age.
- **(FCCERS-R)** *The Family Child Care Environment Rating Scale-Revised* - A revision of the FCCERS, designed to assess family child care programs conducted in a provider's home. The total scale consists of 38 items.

## **Section 3d: High-Quality Workforce**

A high-quality early education experience depends on a high-quality workforce of early educators.

The U.S. Departments of Education and Health and Human Services, recently released a report finding that low compensation in the early learning workforce undermines program quality.<sup>xxxiii</sup> In order to achieve the goal of supporting early learning educators, most of who are women and earn low-wage salaries, the U.S. Departments of Health and Human Services and Education report recommends:

- Career pathways to support professional development of the workforce and to meet the benchmark of a Bachelor’s degree, at a minimum, for lead teachers of children birth through age eight;
- Earnings sufficient to attract and retain a high-quality workforce; and
- Pay parity across settings so that all settings can attract high-quality educators without one type of setting becoming the training ground for another.<sup>xxxiv</sup>

By focusing on these issues, faith-based and community leaders can work to ensure that education, training, and fair compensation for early learning educators and professionals will promote high-quality experiences for all children.

### Professional Development

The National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) holds “a vision of the profession in which early childhood educators exemplify excellence and are recognized as vital and performing a critical role in society.”<sup>xxxv</sup> Understanding the importance of an exceptional system of professional development, NAEYC has developed the [Early Childhood Workforce Systems Initiative](#).<sup>xxxvi</sup> The goal of this initiative is to help states to design, improve, and implement policies that ensure a high-quality professional development system for early childhood education professionals.<sup>xxxvii</sup>

NAEYC offers tools and resources to support and convene policymakers, advocates, and educators to work towards achieving this goal. For more information, faith-based and other communities can view resources such as:

- [Build It Better: Indicators of Progress to Support Integrated Early Childhood Professional Development Systems](#)<sup>xxxviii</sup> — Offers universal indicators in the field of early childhood to build a system that improves the quality of professional development through the integration of both policies and initiatives, and equity and diversity, including compensation parity.<sup>xxxix</sup>
- [Workforce Designs, A Policy Blueprint For State Early Childhood Professional Development Systems](#)<sup>xl</sup> — Provides support for states to design and implement an effective professional development system plan by providing states with key policy areas and principles to structure these frameworks after.<sup>xli</sup>
- [Database of State Policies](#)<sup>xlii</sup> — Confirms whether or not state policies adopt the primary policy principles of integration; assurance; diversity, inclusion, and access; and compensation parity, as outlined in NAEYC’s “Workforce Designs, A Policy Blueprint for State Early Childhood Professional Development Systems.”<sup>xliii</sup>

### Earnings



xliv

To date, early learning professionals are among the lowest paid professionals in the field of education. Working to improve the quality of the workforce includes resolving the vast disparity in workforce earnings. Highly skilled employees are usually recruited and retained by positions that pay higher salaries. Faith-based and community leaders can see average wages in their state by visiting: <http://www2.ed.gov/about/inits/ed/earlylearning/files/ece-low-compensation-undermines-quality-report-2016.pdf> and <http://www.acf.hhs.gov/programs/eecd/high-quality-early-learning-settings-depend-on-a-high-quality-workforce>.

### Section 3e: Frequently Asked Questions: Early Care and Education Funding

Many funding opportunities exist that can enable faith-based and community organizations to operate a high-quality early care and education program without requiring them to allocate funds reserved for their day-to-day operations. Below are frequently asked questions about early care and education funding opportunities of which faith-based and community leaders can take advantage:

Here are some frequently asked questions to help faith-based and community leaders understand Early Head Start and Head Start funding:<sup>xiv</sup>

1. Who can apply for Early Head Start or Head Start funding?

Any faith-based organization or local for-profit organization in the community, that wish to compete for funds that are available to provide Head Start services to children and families.

2. How does Early Head Start differ from Head Start?

Early Head Start serves expectant mothers and children ages 0-3 years old and Head Start serves children ages 3-5 years old.

3. Is there funding to expand my Early Head Start (EHS) center through the Early Head Start Expansion and EHS-Child Care Partnership Grants funding opportunity? Or is this funding opportunity only available for programs to expand their current EHS-Child Care Partnerships or start a new EHS-Child Care Partnership program?

Yes – to both questions: applicants will be able to apply to expand their current EHS program or implement a new EHS program through this funding opportunity.

4. Can there be more than one EHS Child Care partnership in a community if there is a need?

Yes. If an applicant can clearly demonstrate a need for additional Early Head Start services within their community.

5. Will my faith-based or community organization be guaranteed funding?

No. Funding is competitive and is available through an announcement on the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services' [Grants Forecast](https://forecast.grantsolutions.gov/) website at <https://forecast.grantsolutions.gov/>. This website provides information about the federal appropriation for funding in future years.

Be sure to continue to check the ACF website at <http://www.acf.hhs.gov/grants/open/foa/office/ohs> to see when the funding cycle opens and when you can begin to apply.

Interested applicants may visit <http://www.Grants.gov> to locate funding opportunities. Additionally, interested applicants may sign up for email updates from <http://www.Grants.gov> to be notified when the funding opportunity announcements (FOAs) are posted.

6. If there is funding and my organization applies, how will my application be evaluated?

Grant applications receive a comprehensive review. Evaluation criteria vary for each funding opportunity announcement or cycle. However, common categories for evaluation include:

- Objectives and Needs for Assistance;
- Approach;
- Program Performance Evaluation;
- Organizational Capacity; and
- Budget and Budget Justification.

Be sure to check with your local Head start agency for details.

To ensure your application meets all the required criteria, visit the ACF How to Write a Strong Application webpage at <http://www.acf.hhs.gov/grants/howto#chapter-5>.

7. What if my organization is unable or objects to providing certain early learning or family services?

While the federal government is committed to providing children and families with all possible legally permissible services, ACF also recognizes that there may be religious or other objections within some faith-based and other communities. ACF has outlined several ways that faith-based and other community organizations can support children and families if there may be objections to certain human services<sup>xlvi</sup>:

- **Serve as a subgrantee:** subgrantees do not need to provide every service for which the grantee is responsible, as long as all clients served have access to all services required under the grant in a timely and respectful manner.
- **Apply in a consortium:** any organization can apply for grants in a consortium with one or more partners to provide specific services
- **Notify grantor:** the organization should notify the federal program office responsible for the grant if a client's needs or circumstances may require services, including referrals, to which the organization has a religious objection.

For more information on the grant process, please visit the grants and oversight page at <http://eclkc.ohs.acf.hhs.gov/hslc/grants/grant-toolkit/understanding.html> and the funding page at <http://www.acf.hhs.gov/programs/ohs/funding>.

8. Aside from Early Head Start and Head Start, are there additional funding opportunities available to support our early care and education program?

Yes, the families you serve through your early care and education program may be eligible to receive subsidized child care, in which families pay a reduced rate for child care for children ages 0-5 years old or state preschool, which may be free for all four year-olds, if available.

The local Child Care Resource and Referral (CCR&R) agency or lead state child care office in your area that administers subsidized child care and statewide preschool provide reimbursements to child care providers, such as faith-based and other organizations, for providing high-quality care and education to children enrolled in these programs.

These CCR&R and child care agencies may also have additional funding to support quality programs and initiatives that benefit child care providers and faith-based organizations in local communities. For more information, contact the lead child care office in your state or local CCR&R agency. This information can be found by visiting <http://www.acf.hhs.gov/occ/resource/ccdf-grantee-state-and-territory-contacts> and <http://www.childcareaware.org/ccrr-search-form/>.<sup>xxxix</sup>

Faith-based and community leaders are also encouraged to sign-up for list-servs that distribute additional local and national funding opportunity information, such as small business development grants or education grants.

9. Is funding provided for meals for children enrolled in our early care and education program?

Yes, the Child and Adult Care Food Program (CACFP), funded by U.S. Department of Agriculture, provides subsidies for meals and snacks for eligible children enrolled in child care programs. Child care providers and faith-based and other organizations can receive reimbursement for meals and snacks served to eligible children enrolled in their programs. Contact the local school meal contact listed at <http://www.fns.usda.gov/school-meals/school-meals-contacts> for more information. <sup>xxxix</sup>

## Section 4: Call to Action: Purging the Preschool to Prison Pipeline

Historically, faith-based and community leaders have been powerful voices advocating for change in policies that impact families and communities. We are calling on leaders from faith-based and community organizations to examine their local policies to see if they are having a disproportionate negative impact on African American children or other groups that are disproportionately impacted. Faith-based and community leaders are often viewed as unbiased champions on emotionally charged issues related to social justice; this topic in particular is sensitive for parents, teachers, and school administrators. Through more focus on local policies that have a disproportionate negative impact on certain groups of children we can purge the preschool to prison to pipeline.

**“Beginning at birth, all children deserve to feel safe, nurtured, and supported in the spaces designed to ensure their cognitive, social, and emotional development. We must work to end disciplinary practices that result in any child being removed from high-quality learning and development programs and services, temporarily or otherwise. The White House Initiative on Educational Excellence for African Americans supports efforts to eliminate preschool suspension and other practices that negatively impact the achievement and development of our youngest learners.”**

**—David Johns**

### Section 4a: Data and Research

The data and research are clear that African American children appear to be excluded from education spaces due to harsh discipline with long-term negative impacts on their academic careers.

According to the U.S. Department of Education’s Office for Civil Rights, African American public preschool children are suspended from school at high rates:<sup>xlvii</sup>

- **African American children represent 19%** of preschool enrollment, but **47%** of preschool children receiving **one or more out-of-school suspensions**; in comparison, white children represent 41% of preschool enrollment, but 28% of preschool children receiving one or more out-of-school suspensions.
- **African American boys represent 19%** of male preschool enrollment, but **45%** of male preschool children **receiving one or more out-of-school suspensions**.
- **African American girls represent 20%** of female preschool enrollment, but **54%** of female preschool **children receiving one or more out-of-school suspensions**.
- **African American boys represent 8% of all students**, but **19%** of students **expelled** without educational services.

According to a 2015 report from the Center for American Progress and NBCDI, suspension and expulsion for young children leads to:

- More disciplinary action later in their academic career,

- Drop out or fail out of high school,
- Feeling disconnected from school,
- Being incarcerated later in life.

## Section 4b: You Can Make A Difference

Faith-based and community leaders can make a difference by working with local centers to improve practices or working at a broader level with their school board or state legislature to change school discipline policy and ensure equity.

### Addressing discipline practices in early learning programs and schools:

- **Explicitly address racial bias.** Have open dialogue with parents, caregivers, school leaders, and teachers on racial bias to ensure discipline practices are implemented equitable for all children.
- **Ensure teachers are equipped with knowledge.** Advocate for teachers to receive training on social-emotional development and age-appropriate, culturally-responsive practices.
- **Recognize that behavior communicates a need.** Children who are struggling in the classroom environment may need more support. Partner with parents and caregivers to engage mental health specialists and train teachers on mental health identification.
- **Identify positive, age-appropriate discipline practices.** Challenge teachers to develop and clearly communicate preventive guidance and discipline practices.

### Advocating for policy changes in school districts and at the state level:

- **Get the facts.** Request and review data related to suspension and expulsion in your school district and state. Data is a powerful, unbiased tool to raise awareness of this issue to elected officials and local leaders. Join with parents and other educators to inform and educate elected school board members on this issue and hold them accountable for action.
- **Strengthen professional development.** Ensure early learning systems in your city, county or state have the resources to provide training on social emotional development, racial bias, and age-appropriate, culturally-responsive practices.
- **Advocate for wraparound services.** Ensure that early learning systems are equipped to provide supports and resources to families including family counseling, crisis intervention, and referrals to social services.

### Testimonial from an Administrator in an Early Learning Center

My teachers and I became frustrated as we found ourselves resorting to suspension and expulsions. I implemented Childhood Acute Mental Health Practices, called CAMP to avoid the stigma of “mental health” problems. Children receive comprehensive, confidential, and culturally-responsive services including screenings, assessments, and treatments, such as play therapy. Families are empowered through family counseling and crisis intervention services while teachers receive trainings in mental health identification and other developmentally-appropriate practices. We established collaborative partnerships with mental health providers for these services. We also work directly with feeder elementary schools for continuity of services through third grade and, this year, we will expand the program to include home. - Cindra Taylor, President of BCDI-Atlanta Affiliate

## Examples from states and school districts that are taking action:

### School Districts

- [Minneapolis Public Schools](#) stopped elementary suspensions for nonviolent behavior in Pre-K through grade 5.
- [Seattle School District](#) eliminated out-of-school suspensions for students in kindergarten through fifth grade for “disruptive conduct,” “rule breaking,” or “disobedience” and requires the superintendent to address disproportionality in discipline for students of color, students with learning disabilities, and English Language Learners.

### State Legislatures

- [Connecticut](#): the state legislature has prohibited out-of-school suspensions and expulsions of children in preschool and kindergarten through second grade for non-violent/sexual behavior. Early care and education programs can receive grants and professional development to support implementation of positive disciplinary practices as an alternative to suspensions and expulsions.
- [Oregon](#): the state legislature passed a bill limiting the reasons young students up to grade 5 can be suspended or expelled.

### Federal Guidance

The U.S. Departments of Health and Human Services and Education issued a "[Policy Statement on Expulsion and Suspension Policies in Early Childhood Settings](#)"

- *"Those who serve our youngest learners have the responsibility and trust of setting infants, toddlers, and young children on positive trajectories. By reducing and ultimately eliminating expulsion and suspension through nurturing relationships and capacity building, with and on behalf of young children and their families, we can ensure that all of our youngest learners have the tools and experiences they need to thrive."*

### Additional Information

For more information on how to get involved including additional details on legislation and ordinances related to suspension and expulsion as well as potential partner organizations and experts on this issue, you can visit resources such as: <http://www.nbcdi.org/news/stop-madness-purging-preschool-prison-pipeline>.

## About Early Learning at the U. S. Department of Education

**We believe that our nation’s work force can be stronger if we create greater access for high-quality early learning programs. To help support early learning programs,** the President’s 2017 budget request expands access to high-quality early learning and promotes the implementation of evidence-based practices for our youngest learners and improves educational outcomes in the early grades through the “Preschool for All” program. The following section describes this and other relevant budget requests.

- The President’s 2017 budget request includes:
  - The Preschool for All initiative, which would invest \$75 billion over 10 years in a federal-state partnership aimed at providing all 4-year-olds from low- and moderate-income families with access to high-quality preschool. More information can be found at the following webpage <https://www.whitehouse.gov/issues/education/early-childhood>.
  - \$350 million for Preschool Development Grants, which will provide a fourth year of continuation grants for the 18 states with Preschool Development Grants and provide \$100 million for the newly authorized Preschool Development Grants under the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) of 2015.
  - \$403.2 million for *Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) Part B*, Section 619 (preschool grants), an increase of \$35 million for FY2017.
  - \$503.55 million for the **Early intervention program for infants and toddlers with disabilities**, the *IDEA Part C Grants*, which would be an increase of \$45 million over the 2016 level and would provide \$15 million to make new competitive grants to public-private partnerships to support community-based model projects that increase screening and delivery of evidence-based services.
  
- *The Elementary and Secondary Education Act, as amended by the Every Student Succeeds Act*, provides additional funding and support for early learning by strengthening existing programs that may serve preschool-aged children such as 21<sup>st</sup> Century Schools, and Title I, Part A, place-based initiatives such as Promise Neighborhoods and Full-Service Community Schools, and state and local partnerships for improved early learning services for children and families.

To find additional funding opportunities, see the handout *Appendix H*.

## About the White House Initiative on Educational Excellence for African Americans

Nearly 60 years after the *Brown v. Board of Education* decision, African-American students continue to lack equal access to a high-quality education and still lag far behind their white peers in reading and math proficiency, high school graduation rates, and college completion.

That is why President Obama created the White House Initiative on Educational Excellence for African Americans (Initiative). The Initiative is a cross-agency effort aimed at identifying evidence-based practices that improve student achievement and developing a national network to share these best practices.

The Initiative supports the president's desire to "restore the country to its role as the global leader in education, to strengthen the nation by improving educational outcomes for African Americans of all ages, and to help ensure that all African Americans receive an education that properly prepares them for college, productive careers, and satisfying lives," including:

- **Highlighting** the roles of educators and administrators in increasing and improving access to high-quality learning opportunities while also finding ways to support them in their work;
- **Supporting** efforts to increase the number of underrepresented teachers and administrators, including African-American teachers and administrators, including African-American males;
- **Enhancing** investments in high-quality early care and education programs, specifically increasing the number of underserved children, including African-American children enrolled in quality childcare and preschool programs;
- **Reinforcing** connections to rigorous K–12 courses and increasing access to critical supports, including strengthening relationships between schools and communities and with local businesses, social service agencies, health care providers, and parent and volunteer organizations; and
- **Helping** to increase the number of underrepresented students, including African-American students applying to, persisting in and successfully completing college to ensure that the country meets the president's 2020 goal of becoming the world leader in college graduates.

Follow the Initiative on Twitter [\*\*@AfAmEducation\*\*](#) and on Instagram [\*\*@OfficialAfAmEd\*\*](#)

## About the Center for Faith-Based and Neighborhood Partnerships

The mission of the Center for Faith-based and Neighborhood Partnerships at the U.S. Department of Education is to promote student achievement by connecting schools and community-based organizations, both secular and faith-based.

The Center is part of the White House Office of Faith-based and Neighborhood Partnerships, which works to form partnerships between government at all levels and nonprofit organizations, both secular and faith-based, to more effectively serve Americans in need. The office advances this work through Centers and staff at 13 federal agencies across the administration.

The Center's primary goals are to:

- Engage community-based organizations, both secular and faith-based, in building a culture of high expectations and support for education;
- Develop and support initiatives within the federal government to help maximize the education contributions of community-based organizations, including faith and interfaith organizations; and
- Strengthen partnerships between community-based organizations and schools to help improve the nation's lowest-achieving schools.

Follow the Center on Facebook: <https://www.facebook.com/edpartners> and on Twitter @EDpartners

## About the National Black Child Development Institute

### MISSION

For 46 years, the National Black Child Development Institute has been committed to our mission “**to improve and advance the quality of life for Black children and families through education and advocacy.**” With our National Affiliate Network, we develop and deliver strengths-based, culturally relevant, evidence-based and trauma informed curricula and programs that focus on health and wellness and family engagement. We support increased access to effective education by providing professional development scholarships for early childhood educators. NBCDI, the National Affiliate Network and our members advocate and inform education policies at the federal, state and local levels to ensure standards, regulations and resource allocations support equitable systems for Black children and families.

### VISION

NBCDI envisions a society that ensures a successful future for all children.

### HISTORY

From its inception, NBCDI’s focus has been on achieving positive outcomes for vulnerable children who suffer from the dual legacies of poverty and racial discrimination. The organization was launched by the Black Women’s Community Development Foundation, whose leadership, in the wake of the Civil Rights Movement, was deeply concerned about the unsatisfactory conditions faced by families determined to raise healthy Black children. By organizing NBCDI as a national advocacy group, they created a unified movement to develop strategies to improve the life circumstances of the Black child through policy change.

Four years after NBCDI’s incorporation, its leaders launched the National Affiliate Network to mobilize volunteers at the grassroots level. Today, Affiliates operate in over 20 communities and are composed of dynamic and diverse individuals who implement nationally driven programs for children and families on the ground.

Historically, NBCDI has built a strong reputation for its work in early care and education and child welfare. Over the years, our mission has benefited millions of children and their families. As a leading organization working on behalf of children of color, NBCDI’s future is about growth and sustainability, forging new boundaries and promoting strengths-based programs and policies that lift up our children in the context of their families, communities and cultures.

Follow NBCDI on Facebook: [www.facebook.com/nbcdi](http://www.facebook.com/nbcdi)

Follow NBCDI on Twitter and Instagram: **@NBCDI**

## Appendix A

### Early Learning Community Needs Assessment Guide

#### Overview

In order to effectively serve your community, it is important to understand the community's needs for early learning programs. The findings from a community needs assessment will define the extent of the early learning needs that exist in your community and the depth of the assets available within your community to address those needs and improve early learning opportunities. While there is no one "right" way to conduct a community needs assessment, this guide will help you strategically plan and deliver relevant, successful, and timely early learning services.

#### Defining the Terms

- **Community Need** is a "gap between what a situation is and what it should be... Examining needs helps us discover what is lacking, and points us in the direction of future improvement"<sup>16</sup>
- A "**community needs assessment**" is a systematic set of procedures used to determine needs, examine their nature and causes, and set priorities for future action
- **Community assets** are defined as "those things that can be used to improve the quality of life"

#### The Process

An early learning community needs assessment can be completed in a six-step process for planning and conducting a community assessment:

##### Step 1: Define the Scope

Early learning services can be very targeted or quite broad. Understanding what is needed and what is already present in your faith based organization and community helps to define the scope of developing an early learning plan.

- What are the basic demographics of my community (income levels, races/ethnicities, number of youth)?
- Are there other faith- and community-based organizations also providing early learning services to people in my community?
- What organizations are funded by foundations and government agencies to address early learning opportunities?
- What are the current intervention strategies being used in my community to address early learning? Are these practices demonstrating any clear outcomes? If so, what strategies are effective for African American youth?
- Who are the people in my faith-based or community organization and community who care about the issue?
- What are the gaps in early learning services in my faith-based or community organization and community? What is required to ensure every child is safe, supported, and engaged?

**Defining the Scope: Early Learning Opportunities**

<b>Assets: What are the existing strengths?</b>	<b>Gaps: What are the early learning needs?</b>	<b>Possible Outcomes: How can we address these gaps?</b>

## **Step 2: Decide to Work Independently or Collaborate**

Deciding the scope will highlight the choices available to you for conducting an early learning needs assessment. You can decide to “go solo” and carry the entire responsibility for completing all of the following activities; or, you can work with other faith based organizations and community partners as a collaborative project to complete the assessment and develop an early learning plan. The first step of collaboration is to identify faith-based and community organizations interested in partnerships and those already doing this work.

### **Benefits of Collaboration:**

- Engages more faith-based and community organizations and other community members in the assessment planning and implementation process
- Increases access to more data sources to answer the key questions
- Provides access to more resources
- Establishes relationships that will be important for leading actions

## **Step 3: Collect Data**

Your community assessment will be based on different types of data and information sources. Start your data collection with data that has already been collected by others. Other members of your community may have the information that you seek. Begin with local sources of information and then broaden your search as necessary. Focus on quality of data as opposed to quantity, so you can dedicate more time to other aspects of the community assessment. Sources for data include:

- State-Level Department Data on Educational Outcomes for Early Learning
- Local School Reports/Academic Information
- Foundation or Non-Profit Reports on Early Learning
- Census Data
- Focus Group Interviews<sup>1</sup> with parents and/or educators

## **Step 4: Determine Key Findings**

The data collection step might result in a lot of data and information about the early learning needs in your faith based or community organization and community. The key findings can be organized into categories to help summarize the data. When you separate your key findings from one another, you can use them more effectively when planning your response. Common key findings categories used in community assessments include strengths, gaps, opportunities, and challenges. Use the chart below to help you organize the findings.

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<sup>1</sup> A group of people selected for their particular skills, experience, views, or position are asked a series of questions about a topic or issue to gather their opinions. Group interaction is used to obtain detailed information about a particular issue.

**Determine & Share Key Findings**

<b>Key Findings</b>	<b>Strengths</b>	<b>Gaps</b>	<b>Opportunities</b>	<b>Challenges</b>

### **Step 5: Set Priorities and Develop an Action Plan**

To complete an early learning needs assessment, begin by acknowledging the strengths or assets within your faith-based or community organization. Then, set priorities, be realistic, and make informed decisions about your goals and objectives.

For each part of your plan, determine how you will measure the effectiveness of your actions. Adopt measures that help define your strategy and that you will be able to track over time. The plan should include descriptions of the solutions, rationale, proposed timelines, and resource requirements.

### **Step 6: Share Your Findings**

The last step of your community assessment is to share what you have learned with others and to disseminate your plan for supporting early learning opportunities in your faith-based organization or community. Faith-based organizations, families, and community members are more likely to support your efforts when they have a clear understanding of the work you have done and of what their community needs.

There are plenty of ways you can share the findings with the faith-based organization and community:

- Host an open house at the faith-based or community organization
- Hold community meetings to share your report with community members
- Issue press releases to increase dissemination to other faith-based organizations, community organizations, or local media
- Publish a one-page brochure to summarize key findings and actions from the community assessment
- Post the report and findings to the faith-based or community organization's website and social media networks

## **Appendix B**

### **Early Learning Activities**

Child: \_\_\_\_\_

Age: \_\_\_\_\_

#### **Birth to 12 months**

- Nurse baby or hold baby close while bottle feeding
- Respond quickly to baby's cries by meeting baby's needs
- Talk or sing to baby during feeding, changing, and bathing and throughout the day
- Provide many different sounds for baby (soft music, rattle, birds singing, radio, bell)
- Speak in a calm, soothing voice and allow time for baby to respond
- Identify people, objects, and places by name
- Read nursery rhymes and sing songs to baby

#### **12- 24months**

- While child is bathing or dressing, name body parts and encourage child to repeat the names
- Look at a picture book with child and help child name objects in the pictures
- Use simple cause and effect toys (busy box, jack-in-the-box)
- Sing nursery rhymes and other children's songs over and over again
- Do finger plays with child while singing songs (Itsy, Bitsy Spider)
- Make up songs to describe daily care routines
- Play game with blocks (stack them up, knock them down)
- Encourage child to draw or scribble with a crayon or water-soluble marker
- Play a simple game of Simon Says
- Read to child five to ten minutes each day; develop a bedtime book-reading ritual
- Answer child's questions simply

#### **2 – 3 Years Old**

- Talk about things the child likes and ask questions.
- Give directions in small parts.
- Help child make up words that rhyme, for example, "dog, fog, hog, log..."
- Sing the ABC song and other songs that emphasize rhymes, such as "Twinkle, Twinkle, Little Star" or "This Old Man."
- Encourage child to talk with others ("Tell Grandma what we did today")
- Read with child often! Offer a variety of books (use your local library).
- Provide simple puzzles for child to complete

### **3- 4 Years Old**

- Use appropriate words to describe past or future events (today, tomorrow, before, after, next)
- During story time, ask child simple questions about the story (“What do you think will happen next?”)
- Encourage child to sort and match objects during routine tasks (“which things do we need to take a bath?”, “where do the forks go?”, “what other things could you wear on your feet?”)
- Set up cooperative play situations (kicking a ball back and forth; working with another child to “cook” and serve an imaginary meal to dolls or adults)
- Have child make up a story to go with the pictures.
- Give child foam or magnetic letters and name each letter so that the child can hold and touch them. .
- Encourage child to “read” familiar signs such as STOP.

### **4- 5 Years Old**

- Read story books to child
- Ask child questions about stories and have child retell stories
- Encourage child to act out stories from books or imagination and use different voices for the characters
- Engage child in “what if” games to encourage child’s own storytelling (“what if you could fly?”)
- Expand the range of computer software available to child
- Arrange trips to the library, zoo, and special events such as parades • Play rhyming games with child (“can you say three words that rhyme with cat?”)
- Help child develop strategies for solving social problems (“use words, not hitting”, “what else could you do?”, “what will you say next time?”)
- Group same-age children together or invite a child of similar age for a “play date” to encourage cooperative play

## Appendix C

### **“I HAVE A QUESTION... What Parents and Caregivers Can Ask to Help Children Thrive at School: A Parent Checklist”**

#### **Quality: Is my child getting a great education?**

- › How will you keep me informed about how my child is doing on a regular basis? How can we work together if my child falls behind?
- › Is my child on grade level, and on track to be ready for college and a career? How do I know?

#### **Ready for Success: Will my child be prepared to succeed in whatever comes next?**

- › How will you measure my child’s progress and ability in subjects including reading, math, science, the arts, social and emotional development, and other activities?
- › How much time will my child spend preparing for and taking state and district tests? How will my child’s teacher and I know how to use the results to help my child make progress?

#### **Safe and Healthy: Is my child safe and cared for at school?**

- › What programs are in place to ensure that the school is a safe, nurturing and positive environment? What are the discipline and bullying policies at the school?
- › Are the meals and snacks provided healthy? How much time is there for recess and/or exercise?

#### **Great Teachers: Is my child engaged and learning every day?**

- › How do I know my child’s teachers are effective?
- › How much time do teachers get to collaborate with one another?
- › What kind of professional development is available to teachers here?

#### **Equity and Fairness: Does my child, and every child at my child’s school or program, have the opportunity to succeed and be treated fairly?**

- › How does the school make sure that all students are treated fairly? (For example, are there any differences in suspension/expulsion rates by race or gender?)
- › Does the school offer all students access to the classes they need to prepare them for success, including English language learners and students with special needs (for example, Algebra I and II, gifted and talented classes, science labs, AP or IB classes, art, music)?

Source: <https://www2.ed.gov/documents/family-community/parent-checklist.pdf>

## **Appendix D**

### Working with Families to Understand Parenting Styles

#### **Sample Questions:**

- When you think about important decisions you have made as a parent, what comes to mind?
- What do you think you have done that has been the most important for your children? How can you tell?
- Most of us, growing up, think of things we definitely WILL do that our parents did, and things we definitely WON'T do. What are some of those things, from your standpoint, that you bring forward from your own childhood?
- Parenting is not something you wake up and know how to do... sometimes our instincts kick in and other times, we may struggle to figure things out. What are some of the things that come naturally? What are some of the areas where you have reached out for advice or help?
- What is the time of day when you and your children seem to have the best connection? For example, after school, dinner, bedtime?
- What if any time or part of the daily routine seems tough in your family?
- Scaling question—On a scale of 1-10, 1 being not at all and 10 being completely, how would you rate yourself in terms of where you are in comparison with where you want to be in parenting?
  - Any times when it was lower? What helped you raise it?
  - What would it take to move up to 9 or 10?
- Can you walk me through a day in your family/household?
- If one of your kids is being really difficult, what is one creative way you have used to deal with the behavior?
- What can your kids do to really push your buttons? What makes that so for you?
- Describe a great memory you have of your family?
- How would you describe each of your children?
- When is a time when your child was very successful: what part did you play in that success?
- What are ways that you show love to your children?
- Who taught you to be a parent?
- Who is your biggest influence as a parent?
- What do you like about being a parent? What have you learned from the experience?
- If you were describing yourself to others, what sorts of things would you say you are good at?
- How do you usually solve family problems? Who does what?
- What do you do to help yourself deal with the pressures of raising children?

#### **Things to look for:**

- Individualization of parenting based on children's needs
- Positive view of children

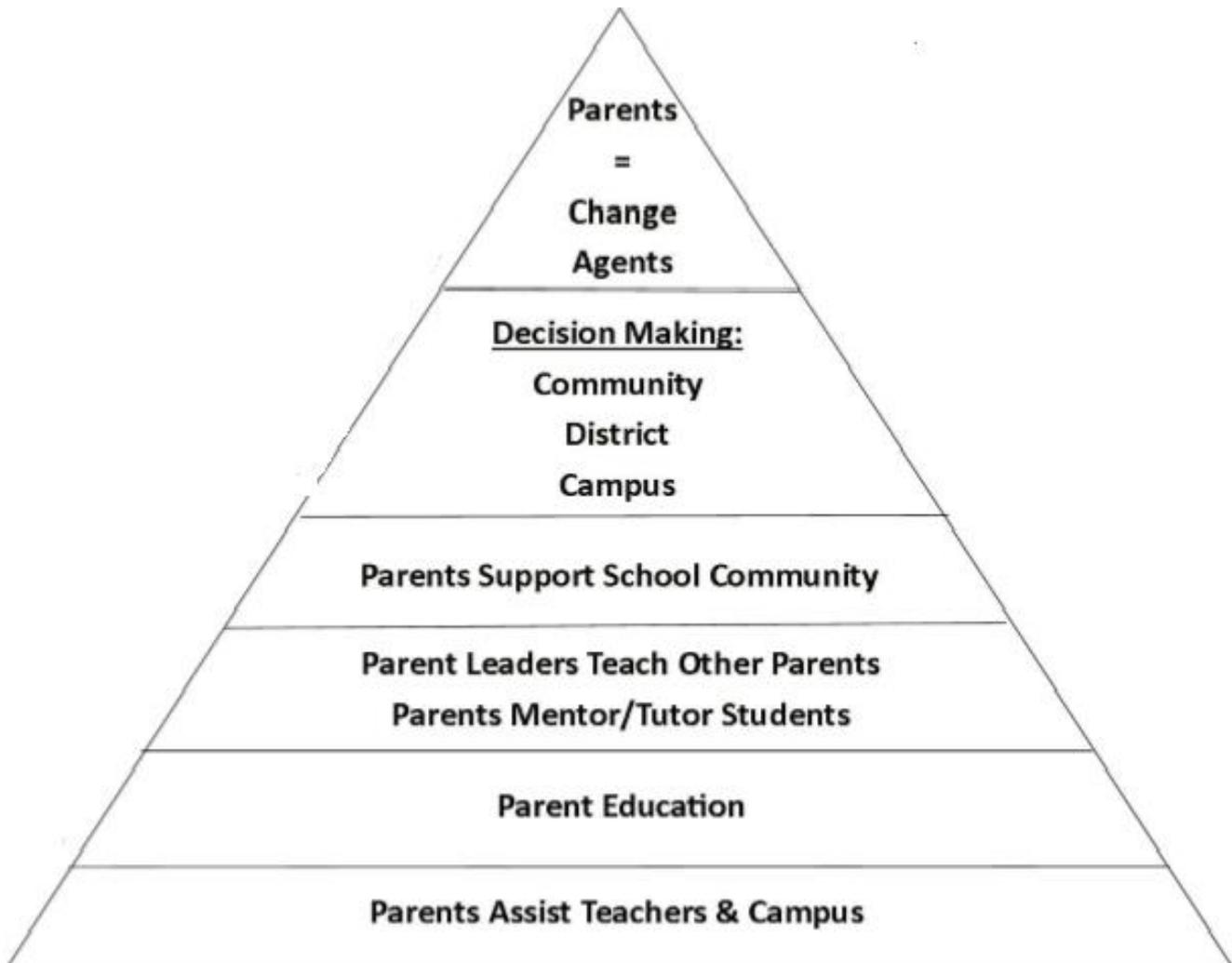
**Strengths you can build on:**

- Humor about children's behaviors, finding the tenderness and humor in parenting moments
- Understanding of the parenting issues that brought them into the system
- Willingness to modify parenting or try new ideas
- Parent is willing and able to parent
- Can identify and find family members who can be of help and provide relief and advice

**Concerns:**

- Adamant or rigid about parenting style
- Child has taken on the parenting role in the family
- Parent has unrealistic expectations for the child
- Lack of consistent parenting or supervision
- Responds negatively, harshly, tone of voice is generally angry or harsh
- Excludes the child
- Negative to normal developmental behaviors

**Appendix E**  
**Parent Involvement Continuum**



- Develop a family engagement system that empowers parents and caretakers to support student achievement
- Build capacity to ensure effective involvement of parents and caretakers to support school- home-faith based organization partnerships
- Develop new capacities, skills, and knowledge so parents can strengthen their families and communities
- Create opportunities for all parents and caretakers to forge new relationships and networks
- Sustain continuous practices for parent engagement as an integral part of school-home-ongoing planning and decision-making

**Appendix F**  
**50 Ways to Get Families Engaged**

1. Give positive feedback and show appreciation for teachers and the principal.
2. Approach interactions with a positive attitude and an open mind.
3. Listen to others' viewpoints.
4. Share students' strengths, talents, and interests.
5. Share expectations and set goals together for your child.
6. Make appointments as needed to discuss your child's progress or concerns.
7. Attend parent-teacher conferences with specific questions you want to ask.
8. Indicate the best way to give you information (phone, e-mail, notes, etc.).
9. Understand and reinforce school rules and expectations at home.
10. Participate in informal opportunities to talk with and get to know school teachers, leaders, and staff.
11. Address concerns or questions honestly, openly, and early on.
12. Attend PTA or parent meetings regularly.
13. Read classroom and/or school newsletters.
14. Visit your school's web page.
15. Know school staff's extensions and office hours.
16. Read and know your school's handbook.
17. Request that information be available in all relevant languages.
18. Share your family's culture, values, and parenting practices with your child's school.

19. Share your perceptions with educators and school staff of how parents are treated.
20. Work with school staff and educators to revise and improve perceptions and school climate.
21. Meet your child's friends and get to know their parents.
22. Contact your school for information on family programs and resources.
23. Help establish a parent resource center at school and at faith based organization.
24. Help create a toy/book lending library at faith based organization and encourage youth to visit it regularly.
25. Assist in developing parent support programs/groups at faith based organization and attend them.
26. Attend workshops or seminars on supporting academic excellence.
27. Host parenting classes on child development, expectations, discipline, etc.
28. Attend parent fairs and other events especially for parents and families.
29. Start a parent book club to discuss current publications.
30. Help create and/or contribute to a school newsletter on parenting.
31. Assist in creating and/or offer your services to before- and after-school programs.
32. Build a child file with medical records, pictures, fingerprints, etc.
33. Make donations and/or offer to work at clothing drives or swaps, food co-ops, etc.
34. Ask faith leaders, teachers, or counselors about how to talk with your children about tough topics.

35. Discuss your child's school day and homework daily.
36. Learn your child's strengths and weaknesses in different areas of school.
37. Provide a quiet, well-lighted place with basic school supplies for studying/home work.
38. Help your children break down projects into smaller, more manageable steps.
39. Develop a consistent daily routine and time for studying and home work.
40. Provide encouragement and approval for effort and schoolwork.
41. Share your interests, hobbies, and talents with your children.
42. Provide children with books, magazines, and so forth, and develop a nighttime reading routine.
43. View selected TV programs together and then review and discuss them.
44. Make family trips to the library, zoo, museum, or park a fun learning experience.
45. Talk with your child's teacher on creating home learning games and activities.
46. Complete interactive homework assignments with your child.
47. Attend meetings on learning expectations, assessment, and grading procedures.
48. Help set goals and develop a personalized education plan for your child.
49. Participate in activities that help you understand school technology.
50. Help plan and attend family nights on improving study habits, doing homework, etc.

Presented by the National Parent Teacher Association (NPTA)

For more ways to get families engaged visit: <http://web.alsde.edu/general/pta%20100%20ways.pdf>

Appendix G  
**DISABILITY TERMINOLOGY CHART**

When referring to people with disabilities, choose words that reflect dignity and respect. Use language that describes the person's disability without defining the individual *as* his or her disability. The following are just some examples.

INAPPROPRIATE	APPROPRIATE
The disabled, the handicapped	People with disabilities, the disability community
Crippled, suffers from, afflicted with, stricken with, victim of, invalid	Has a disability, is a person with a disability
Normal person, healthy, whole	People without disabilities, able-bodied, person who is able to walk, person who can see, etc.
The blind, the deaf	Person who is blind, person who is deaf or hard of hearing
Wheelchair bound, confined or restricted to a wheelchair	Person who uses a wheelchair, wheelchair user
Handicap parking	Accessible parking, parking for people with disabilities
Dumb, mute	Person who cannot speak, has difficulty speaking, uses synthetic speech, is non-vocal, non-verbal
Stutterer, tongue-tied	Person with a speech impairment, who has a speech disability, speech disorder, or communication disability
CP victim, spastic	Person with cerebral palsy
Crippled, lame, deformed	Person with a disability, walks with a cane, uses leg braces
Epileptic	Person with epilepsy, person with seizure disorder
Fit, attack	Seizure, epileptic episode or event

Crazy, maniac, lunatic, insane, nuts, deranged, psycho, demented	People with emotional disorders, mental illness, mental health disability, psychiatric disability
Retard, mentally defective, moron, idiot, slow, imbecile, feeble-minded, Down's person, mongoloid	Person with a developmental disability, person with mental retardation, person with a developmental delay, person with Down syndrome or person who is brain injured, has traumatic brain injury, is brain damaged, with a closed head injury
Slow learner, retarded	Person who has a learning disability
Dwarf, midget	Short stature, little person
Paraplegic, quadriplegic	Person with spinal cord injury, man with paraplegia, woman who is paralyzed
Birth defect	Congenital disability, birth anomaly
A post-polio, suffered from polio	Has had polio, experienced polio
Homebound	Stay-at-home, hard for the person to get out
Senile, demented	Person with Alzheimer's disease, person who has dementia

Source: <http://www.courts.ca.gov/partners/documents/7-terminology.pdf>

## Appendix H: OTHER EARLY LEARNING EFFORTS

The following list provides information about a sample of other efforts to support early learning educational opportunities.

- **Child Care and Development Fund (CCDF):** This fund requirements are that: child care providers must receive training in health and safety; states must create a progression of professional development and set annual ongoing training requirements; quality dollars can be spent on supporting costs of professional development; and a percentage of all quality dollars is targeted for improving the quality of care for infants and toddlers. For more information, please see <http://www.acf.hhs.gov/occ/resource/child-care-and-development-fund>.
- **Head Start and Early Head Start:** The Head Start law sets qualifications for teachers and teaching assistants in Head Start programs and requires ongoing professional development and individualized professional development plans. Head Start teachers in most programs have outpaced the expectations for degree attainment put forward in the law.
  - Early Head Start programs also provide comprehensive services that benefit children, families, and teachers, including: health, developmental and behavioral screenings; higher health, safety and nutrition standards; increased professional development opportunities for teachers; increased parent engagement opportunities with supports to connect families with literacy and workforce development programs.  
For more information, please see <http://www.acf.hhs.gov/programs/ece/early-learning/ehs-cc-partnerships>.
- **State Early Care and Learning Advisory Councils:** Authorized in the Head Start Act, these collaborative councils must develop recommendations on statewide professional development and career advancement plans and assess the capacity and effectiveness of institutes of higher education to support the development of early childhood educators. For more information, please see <http://www.acf.hhs.gov/ece/early-learning/state-advisory-councils>.
- **Early Childhood Training and Technical Assistance System:** Various federal technical assistance centers develop and disseminate high-quality, evidence-based resources and practices, and provide training and technical assistance at the regional, state, and local levels. For more information, please see <http://www.acf.hhs.gov/ece/interagency-projects/ece-technical-assistance>.
- **Race to the Top – Early Learning Challenge Grants:** One of the five components of a state’s grant is focused on early childhood workforce improvements, and twenty States received awards under this program. For more information, please see <http://www2.ed.gov/programs/racetothetop-earlylearningchallenge/index.html>.

**Pay for Success** is a financing mechanism that leverages community-based solutions to public sector interests with private investment. For a description of how Pay For Success projects can work, as well as additional resources, please see <http://www2.ed.gov/about/inits/ed/pay-for-success/index.html>.

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